

Proposal Title	IRF Regional Offices in Eastern, Southern and Western Ukraine
Reserve Fund	Eurasia Reserve Funds
Collaborating Programs	Eurasia Program, IRF Ukraine
Recommended by	Yevhen Bystrytsky, Director, International Renaissance Foundation
Coordinated by	Inna Pidluska, Deputy Director, IRF and Stanislav Liachinskiy, Civil Society Initiative Director, IRF Tatyana Margolin, Regional Manager for National Foundations - Eurasia Program
Approver	Leonard Benardo, Regional Director
Amount Requested	\$690,458
Unforeseen need	<p>The unprecedented self-organization of civil society during the Maidan contributed directly to the removal of the authoritarian Yanukovich regime and created new opportunities at the national and grassroots levels for reforming the country. The Russian annexation of the Crimea and the ongoing Russian-sponsored separatism, armed interventions in eastern Ukraine, and radicalization of citizens' views on the future of the state and their role in it brought in new challenges. The Minsk protocol and subsequent implementation memorandum signed in September offer a way out of the worst fighting. But they are likely to create a dangerous, unresolved situation around Donetsk and Luhansk. The agreements also do nothing to address the need for reconciliation and dialogue. Civil society, particularly in the regions directly affected by the conflict, has a crucial role to play in keeping Ukraine's integrity, building confidence in communities, while pushing the government for the much-needed reforms.</p> <p>Civil society initiatives from around the country are advocating for reforms, taking initiative at the grassroots to address pressing issues caused by the ongoing conflict, including the provision of assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs). NGOs and innovative post-Maidan initiatives in the regions are taking the lead in developing and maintaining dialogue, confidence-building and reconciliation between Ukraine's diverse regions and interest groups. IRF's engagement with the key civil society initiatives and its commitment to uphold the "spirit of Maidan," make it well placed to lead in empowering these local initiatives.</p> <p>George Soros recognized IRF's critical role in supporting civil society and reforms during his March and June trips and recommended that the foundation open three regional offices to build on post-Maidan activism and strengthen cross-regional cooperation in addressing the conflict and making the most of decentralisation, anti-corruption and other reforms. IRF will thus become the first major donor to have a field presence to help develop community and cross-regional initiatives. The</p>

	<p>government has committed to decentralization, which IRF will be in an ideal position to support with new offices in the Kharkiv (east), Odessa (south) and Lviv (west).</p> <p>The local offices' objectives are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen self-organization and the advocacy capacity of local initiatives; Create an environment conducive to building trust, conflict mediation and reconciliation through civil society dialogue and civic education; Build bridges between different regions of Ukraine, and link persons with different political affinities living in the same region; Encourage integration in political and social life of persons most effected by the conflict, IDPs, former combatants and local authorities; Build strategic communication and collaborative efforts between NGOs, grassroots activists and media; Support participation of civil society in implementing and monitoring of decentralization and other reforms. <p>With a tentative ceasefire in place, the moment is ripe to open these regional offices. Local authorities and the central government have been informed and are supportive of the initiative. Civil society activists in the three cities are also eager to develop their cooperation with the offices.</p>
Activities proposed (500 words)	<p>IRF chose Kharkiv and Odessa as they are the country's second and third- largest cities, respectively, where pro-Russian sentiment and separatism are the highest after the Donbas. Conflict prevention work is needed to help ensure that tensions do not escalate. Lviv, on the other hand, is an important regional center in Western Ukraine with a vibrant civil society, pro-European population and a number of best practices to be shared with other regions. Each of the regional offices will also reach out to civic initiatives in the neighboring regions: the Kharkiv regional office includes Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhya in the East; the Odessa office covers Kherson and Mykolayiv in the South; and the Lviv office is responsible for Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil and Transcarpathia in the West.</p> <p>IRF has selected staff (an office coordinator and assistant) and the regional offices are ready to start up activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building organizational capacity and networking of grassroots initiatives; - Engaging grassroots partners, NGOs and volunteer initiatives and local self-governance bodies in building regional/local frameworks for substantive debates aiming at reconciliation and presenting policy alternatives. - Dialogue and mediation between (1) people with different political views within the local communities (in particular, in Eastern Ukraine); (2) IDPs and local residents; (3) people and groups from eastern, southern and western regions of Ukraine;

and, when possible (4) with people from the vulnerable territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast;

- Development of grassroots civic journalism with the launch of local communication platforms;
- Information dissemination and engagement in the reforms developed and advocated by civic experts of the Revival Reform Package, the Reform Support Center, the Strategic Advisory Groups (SAGs)/National Reform Council and the Ukrainian Strategic Communication Taskforce (USCT).

The regional offices will also implement projects that IRF developed in 2014 as part of its Emergency Response program. In 2015 they will implement IRF core activities. These include:

- The Civil Society Forums, which IRF launched in February 2014 as platforms for solidarity, self-organization and joint planning by civil society groups during the Maidan. The IRF regional offices will serve as a partner, a platform and a convener for NGOs, volunteers, media and local authorities from across Ukraine to address the country's most pressing challenges, advocate for reforms, facilitate peer-learning for organizational development and training;
- IRF's "School of Leaders of Change," which brings together prominent local activists from newly-emerged civic initiatives and builds up their organizational development capacities. Some 50 activists are expected to graduate from the School and then continue to collaborate horizontally and with IRF regional offices, engage in civil society empowerment, social-political reforms and local decision making provided by the forthcoming decentralisation process;
- Investigative journalism projects, supported through open calls for proposals to regularly produce content for free reuse by local and national media, especially on the subjects of corruption, human rights violations, failure to pursue reforms, misuse of public funds.

To develop local initiatives and help create more professional community organizations, IRF will run three open calls for proposals (one in 2014 and two in 2015). During each call, 9-10 civic initiatives will be supported in each region (or +/- 30 small projects per office by the end of 2015). While each mini-project will not exceed a \$5,000 grant, the total for such a large number of projects (\$480,000) is justified by the need to inject local level support to community initiatives which until now have had inadequate resources to grow and develop into more sustainable organizations who can reach out to more traditional donors. Through these grants IRF local offices will also secure their place in Kharkiv, Odessa and Lviv as civil society development and mediation hubs, promoting innovative, locally relevant projects.

In 2015 funds are also being requested to provide support for ten small

	<p>confidence-building projects. All too often people from different conflicting sides eagerly meet but are unable to develop cooperation into more solid and sustainable forms of reconciliation due to lack of funding. This project seeks to address this lacuna.</p> <p>The regional offices will ensure IRF's on-site presence and serve as conveners, information and best practice centers. Staff will work not only in the cities where they are based, but in the broader geographic region. They are likely to very quickly become the obligatory "first stop" for donors and organizations based in Kyiv looking for contacts in the regions. Especially in Kharkiv and Odessa, the existing OSCE Monitoring Mission (as it turns to more mediation work), USAID-OTI and UNDP community development initiatives are prime early partners.</p> <p>The regional offices will each be run by one or two IRF full-time contractors, governed by IRF's policies and procedures, and reporting to IRF Administration. They will function as IRF branch offices and will each have their own expert advisory boards composed of regional civil society and opinion leaders, to secure local buy-in, review grassroots proposals and recommend them for support. Final funding awards will be made by the Kyiv-based expert board of the Civil Society Program Initiative.</p> <p>To best support dialogue and experience sharing between the regions, all staff from the regional offices will meet together once every 3 months. Ongoing communication will be facilitated by the Civil Society Program Initiative.</p> <p>The project is planned for 18 months (July 2014 - December 2015), after which it is expected that the conflict situation will have improved and the local offices will be integrated into IRF core activities, find funding elsewhere or close. During this time the offices expect to have given local initiatives the necessary tools to improve their own chances of sustainability.</p>
The risks involved	<p>A danger remains that the war will restart and engulf Kharkiv and Odessa. The regional offices aim to play a conflict prevention role by encouraging dialogue to reduce tensions at the local level. But if tensions are again fuelled by Russia, especially through the delivery of more weapons or actual troops, the offices may be forced to close. Political mobilization of civic initiatives and their misuse by political populists of all kinds creates risks to credibility and sustainability of civil society's efforts. We assess, however, that in this period "between war and peace" the positive contribution that the offices could make overrides the real risks that they face.</p>
Statement of who within OSF would lead the work	<p>Yevhen Bystrytsky, IRF Executive Director, will supervise the initiative. Stanislav Liachinskiy will lead the regional offices activity as the director of IRF's Civil Society Program Initiative (full-time). IRF Financial Department and Grant Management Department will manage the grants according to IRF/OSF procedures. The financials will be done by the IRF Financial Department. Evaluation of the initiative will be</p>

	<p>performed by Inna Pidluska, IRF Deputy Executive Director; an external evaluation may be carried out at the end of the initiative and funded from the IRF core budget.</p> <p>IRF will provide three narrative and financial reports on this project by 30 December 2014, 30 June 2015 and 30 December 2015.</p>
<p>Contributions expected from various units within OSF and essential partners or grantees (250 words)</p>	<p>IRF will collaborate with the Eurasia Program and thematic programs who in 2015 seek to implement projects in Ukraine's regions. The Think Tank Fund for example is interested in cooperating with the regional offices to help its local think tanks partners in Kyiv expand their activities in the east and south.</p> <p>In 2014 funding for the whole regional offices project is being requested from the Eurasia regional funds (\$291,133) as this is an unexpected project.</p> <p>But in 2015 the national foundation will cover close to half (\$340,000) of the total project costs (\$739,325). While IRF cannot pay for the administrative costs of the offices through its core budget, it will finance a majority of the activities being implemented in the regions. This includes the Investigative Journalism Program (\$50,000), School of Leaders of Change (\$60,000), small grants for confidence building (\$60,000), part of the small grants for local democracy in communities and implementation of reforms at the local level (\$120,000) and regional activist forums (\$50,000) components. This project could therefore be an effective example of EP-IRF collaboration and cost-sharing.</p> <p>It is also likely that other international donors/organizations will become familiar with the regional offices and in 2015 become interested in implementing projects with them.</p> <p>IRF will engage with other donors to mobilize their support for activities at the regional and local levels to further promote confidence building and reconciliation through mediation and training, as well as participation of civil society in implementing and monitoring decentralisation, anticorruption and other reforms. Discussions have already begun with both Swiss and UK based mediation/conflict resolution organizations, USAID / OTI on possible future common work engaging the regional offices.</p>